

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 4028

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 2757

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, US

SUBJ: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASAD -- JULY 19

REF: STATE 170470

1. MY ONE HOUR MEETING WITH ASAD ENDED AT 2245 LOCAL. HIS INITIAL REACTION IS THAT JULY 26 MEETING WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE. HE REVEALED THAT CONFERENCE TO ELECT A NEW NATIONAL COMMAND FOR THE BAATH PARTY HAD STARTED JULY 17 AND THAT IT UNLIKELY TO WIND UP PRIOR JULY 26. (COMMENT: THIS CONFERENCE IS STILL BEING KEPT SECRET BY SARG.)

UNTIL CONFERENCE IS OVER, HE UNABLE LEAVE COUNTRY. HE WILL, HOWEVER, STUDY QUESTION WITH HIS ADVISERS AND GIVE FINAL ANSWER TOMORROW JULY 20.

2. BELIEVE ASAD DEFINITELY FELT HE WAS BEING GIVEN GENUINE CHOICE BETWEEN JULY 26 AND SEPTEMBER MEETING WITH PRESIDENT FORD. HE DID NOT INDICATE WHETHER HE PLANS ATTEND SPECIAL SESSION OF UNGA.

3. ASAD ASKED ABOUT PROGRESS OF ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS NOTING HE UNDERSTOOD ISRAEL HAD HANDED OVER A NEW MAP FOR TRANSMISSION TO CAIRO. I SAID I HAD NOTHING DEFINITIVE TO REPORT BUT THAT SECRETARY WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH HIM LATER AS SITUATION WARRANTED.

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HE DID NOT PRESS FURTHER.

4. SUBJECT OF UNEF MANDATE EXTENSION DID NOT REPEAT NOT COME UP.

5. COMMENTING ON ATMOSPHERE OF KHADDAM'S JUNE VISIT TO WASHINGTON, ASAD SAID FROM ALL HE HAD HEARD ATMOSPHERE HAD BEEN "POSITIVE ANB WARM." (I REPLIED THIS HAD BEEN OUR FEELING AS WELL. ADDED THAT ADMINISTRATION HAD BEEN AND WAS CONTINUING EXPEND GREAT EFFORTS TO DEEPEN AMERICAN PUBLIC'S UNDERSTANDING OF MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM AND THAT PRESIDENT WAS ABSOLUTELY DETERMINED NOT ALLOW SITUATION TO STAGNATE. ASAD SAID THAT HAD BEEN HIS IMPRESSION AND HE WAS PLEASED TO HAVE ME CONFIRM IT.

6. AT END OF MEETING I EXPRESSED OUR APPRECIATION FOR SYRIAN EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF COLONEL MORGAN. NOTED WE DID NOT UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING THAT HAD TAKEN PLACE IN THIS CASE BUT KNEW SYRIA HAD CONTRIBUTED TO FAVORABLE TURN OF EVENTS. ASAD SAID SARG HAD TRIED ITS BEST AFTER I HAD RAISED MATTER WITH SHIHABI. HE DID NOT FURTHER ELABORATE.

7. ON LEAVING PRESIDENCY, ASAD'S PRESS SECRETARY, WHO HAD ATTENDED MEETING, ASKED IF MEDIA SHOULD BE INFORMED THAT I HAD BROUGHT MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT FORD TO ASAD. REPLIED THAT MATTER WAS, OF COURSE, FOR ASAD TO DECIDE BUT WOULD PERSONALLY RECOMMEND SARG MAKE NORMAL ROUTINE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT I HAD MET WITH PRESIDENT. NOTED THAT TO TALK OF "MESSAGE" COULD AROUSE UNWARRANTED SPECULATION IN LIGHT OF INTENSIVE PRESS ATTENTION CURRENTLY BEING PAID INTERCHANGES BETWEEN ISRAEL, WASHINGTON AND EGYPT. PRESS SECRETARY AGREED AND SAID HE WOULD MAKE SAME POINT TO ASAD.
MURPHY

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